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Support on the State Level for those Developmentally Above the Minimum

The state of New Jersey is tasked with a broad range of children's abilities, from the gifted, to the developmentally challenged. We have implemented responsible systems and controls, which are then doubly re-enforced by the "No Child Left Behind" act to bolster the developmentally challenged, but lack focus to support the children who one day will be our counties leaders.

It is imperative in the current school systems that we develop leaders, scientists, inventors, orators, or ultimately, we will lose leadership in the world arena, and all of the associated benefits to all of our communities. The Public School Act of 1975 specified that an element of a thorough and efficient education shall include "a breadth of program offerings designed to develop the individual talents and abilities of pupils", all pupils.

In 2005, NJ was identified is one of only 6 states to lack state department of education representation and funding for those who are gifted and talented. With out commitment of either personnel or funding, the Gifted and Talented (G&T) programs struggle, and the programs that support the developmentally advanced children falter.

The effects are seen in the schools, not only for those who qualify for the Gifted and Talented programs, but those in the upper ranges of ability. By polling others in my own district, and in others (Princeton, Montgomery, and S. Brunswick, Riverton), I have seen that the focus is on the lower end of the spectrum, and on the core curriculum guidelines.

One teacher actually stated to a parent "We are only required to teach..... in first grade" as it was mandated by the level outlined in the core curriculum

But who can expect otherwise? The school districts are not given the supports, initiative, or the guidance to diversify the curriculum in the classroom, and the classrooms are consequently driven to a tight range of developmental abilities just above the core curriculum guidelines.

In schools that have stepped ahead (Princeton Charter School and Rumson), and have the self guidance to diversify the classroom, over achieving scores are reached without losing the developmentally challenged child. They have made developmental diversity a criteria by which teachers are evaluated. The core curriculum guide is a safety net, but it is not the appropriate curriculum for our

potential leaders. We need to embrace the needs and the challenges of the advance learner. The schools need support and guidance from the State.

Every child needs to learn the thrill of successfully overcoming a challenge – even those that are bright. We must remember that being bright is not good enough in the world, and we are teaching the bright children poor life skills:

- lethargy
- poor social behavior
- perfectionism
- disrespect
- peer conformity.

We are not teaching our future leaders how to

- explore
- challenge
- invent
- study
- the joy in mastering the complex.

Without representation of the upper level learner at the state level, the gifted and talented, and developmentally able child are not being given the opportunity to learn critical skills.

Because we are an age peer driven education system, we need a position, a person in Trenton at Department of Education whose sole responsibility is gifted, and the developmentally capable. Someone is needed who can focus on how to merge their needs into the classroom. Philosophically this is a huge hurdle, but many of the practical, tactical steps need not be as large. Philosophical changes need to come from the top, the leadership: in this case, the department of education.